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NOTES FROM THE MEDICAL PRESS

IN CHARGE OF

ELISABETH ROBINSON SCOVIL

VARNISH FOR SURGEONS' HANDS.—In the *Medical Record*, Dr. Elsie McDonald recommends a varnish for coating the hands which is impervious, sterile and easily applied and said to be far superior to rubber gloves. It is composed of a base of pyroxylin (soluble cotton), dissolved in amyl acetate and acetone with the addition of propyl and ethyl alcohol and other ingredients. The exact formula is not given.

THE PAINS OF DEATH.—The London letter of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* says that these pains are a popular and not a medical belief. The difficult breathing suggests a struggle, seemingly painful. In fact the accompanying asphyxia produces stupor which ends in coma. Sir Henry Morris points out that it is easy to relieve the difficult breathing common to many conditions by turning and keeping the patient on one side. Where paralysis exists the paralyzed side should be downward, enabling the upper lung to act freely. He thinks that in some cases of apoplexy, patients have died from being kept on the back, rather than from injury to the brain, suffocation ensuing from the position.

SOUR MILK IN DIPHTHERIA.—A correspondent in the same journal recommends swabbing the throat of a diphtheria patient with sour milk when other means are not at hand. In no case should this method supersede the use of anti-toxin as soon as possible.

TOBACCO SMOKING AND MENTAL EFFICIENCY.—In a test reported in the *New York Medical Journal*, it was found that tobacco smoking produced a decrease in mental efficiency of 10.5 per cent. The three greatest losses were in imagery, perception and association. Cigarettes were the most injurious. Pyridine seemed to be the principal toxic factor in all tobacco smoke.

NURSING WOMEN.—A French medical journal says that the effect of the child sucking the breast is the best stimulant to increase the flow of the milk. Some children have a congenital intolerance for breast milk and cannot assimilate it. Cabbage eaten by the mother may occasion diarrhoea in the child. Abuse of chocolate may also injure the baby. Supervision of the diet of the nursing mother is important.

PITUITARY PREPARATIONS AFTER OPERATIONS.—Dr. T. W. Harvey, in the *Medical Record*, recommends the hypodermic injection of pituitary

extracts, 0.5 to 1 cc., beginning either immediately after or about four hours after operation, for the relief of gas pains in abdominal operations. The immediate effect is to cause the patient to pass urine, so it may supersede the catheter. It stimulates peristalsis so that the patient soon expels gas. There is no pain, and morphia is not required. It is useful in cases of fecal accumulation in the colon. It has proved valuable in suppurative peritonitis.

TUBERCLE BACILLUS IN THE FECES.—The same journal believes it to be as important to disinfect the stools of tubercular patients as to disinfect the sputum. The danger of contaminating water supplies is really greater than in the case of the typhoid bacillus because of the greater resistance of the tubercle germ. The swallowed sputum is the most probable origin of these organisms, though ulcers are often found in the intestines at autopsies.

WHOOPING COUGH.—A writer in a German medical journal relies chiefly on nourishing food and out-of-door life in the treatment of this disease. Sedatives may be given as indicated. If change of air is necessary, care should be taken not to spread the infection. Direct contact is necessary to do this, the contagion being carried by the sputum alone.

TRAINING THE LEFT-HANDED.—The *Journal of the American Medical Association*, in answer to a correspondent says that left-handedness seems to be hereditary and it is not wise to attempt to change the condition, as this is greatly to the detriment of the children in all their handiwork. The left hand should be trained exactly as the right hand is in ordinary children. A distinguished physician has said that this condition occurs in children who see more clearly with the left eye than with the right and therefore use the left hand as in the line of vision.

EARLY ANESTHESIA.—The same journal says, in a quotation, that anesthetics were experimented with almost as zealously during the latter half of the thirteenth century as during the latter half of the nineteenth. The experimenters were probably not so successful as we have been, but they did succeed in producing insensibility to pain, or they could never have operated to the extent which they did. Tradition shows that Da Luccas had invented a method that left little to be desired in this matter.

CARE OF SURGICAL PATIENTS.—There are some valuable hints in a paper in *The Medical Record*, emanating from the Mayo Clinic. In dilation of the stomach after excessive vomiting, the patient should be prone in bed with a pillow under the hips. Prone means turned on the chest, face downwards. Quite frequently this immediately relieves the condition. A simple expedient to assist the patient to expel mucus from

the respiratory tract consists in holding him upright in bed, firmly supporting the abdomen by encircling the waist from behind. Braced in this way, the patient can usually cough up the mucus. In difficult urination, it is better to get the patient out on the side of the bed than to use a catheter. Cystitis is a bad exchange for any disability he may have been relieved from. In lung complications keep up the body heat, giving all the fresh air available. Postural drainage is recommended. In cases of perforated appendix, with peritonitis, if the patient is kept well up in bed, lying to the extreme right side, he has a better chance of recovery. Frequent changes of the wet dressing are necessary. In phlebitis, rest and the application of local heat are the chief reliance.

SALE OF MERCURY RESTRICTED.—The Board of Health of New York City has forbidden the sale at retail of bichloride of mercury in the dry form except upon the prescription of a physician or veterinary. It must be dispensed in tablets of a special form and color, labeled poison, and contained in a sealed glass bottle, conspicuously marked poison in red letters.

ASTHMA.—Dr. B. C. Davies, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, suggests this is not a disease but a reflex symptom arising from irritation of one of the nerve centers. He believes the cause to be spasm of the circular muscular fibers of the bronchial wall, resulting from irritation. Uterine disorders may be the exciting cause, also indigestion, requiring food restriction and a well-fitting belt support, when the abdominal walls are lax. Adenoids and diseased tonsils may be contributing factors. Instead of treatment with drugs, the cause should be sought and removed.

THE EDUCATED PERSON.—Oliver Wendell Holmes defines the educated man not as one who knows everything but as one who knows where to find what he wants to know. Hence the use of compendiums, dictionaries, etc.

TUBERCULOSIS AS AN INFECTIVE DISEASE.—In an article in *The Lancet*, it is contended that infection takes place largely in infancy and early childhood. It is stated that direct communication from one human patient to another does not occur in adults under good sanitary conditions, with the possible exceptions of a few instances in which there has been very close and prolonged contact. Under bad hygienic conditions direct infection may occur, children being especially susceptible.

RETARDATION OF AMERICAN SCHOOL CHILDREN.—The *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports an address on this subject before the Schoolmasters' Association of New York. The speaker opposed the idea that the work required of boys in school caused nervous or mental breakdown. He insisted that as compared with foreign

schools too little work was required and too little time devoted to the courses of study. Mental work is not only healthful to the growing child but really beneficial. The brain is the best protected organ of the human body. It and all its tissues rest one third of the day. Given a healthy child, living in healthy surroundings, mental work may be pressed without injury.

THE TRAINED NURSE OF THE FUTURE.—In a thoughtful paper in the same journal, too full of points to be easily condensed, it is stated that the demand for legislation creating state boards of examiners to regulate the practice and to legalize the practitioners of nursing, may be taken as an acknowledgement of the relation of the nurse as a social servant in the state, whose capacity to serve in a calling which involves the health and life of its citizens, should be attested by the license of the commonwealth. The university schools for nurses guarantee that the student's educational interest shall be paramount and that the pupil nurse shall not be exploited for the benefit of the hospital. The university degree of Graduate of Nursing is conferred by the Board of Regents. The University of Minnesota is the pioneer of this movement.

The *New York Medical Journal* states that the following resolutions in reference to operations upon the tonsils have been voted by the Public Health, Hospital and Budget Committee of the New York Academy of Medicine:

Resolved, That it is the sense of this committee that all operations on the tonsils should be performed in hospitals or in such dispensaries as are provided with operating rooms and with recovery ward facilities.

Resolved, That private hospitals of the city be requested to co-operate with the health department of the city in the operative care of children with enlarged tonsils and adenoids; that these hospitals provide proper and adequate facilities for such cases, and that the city compensate the hospitals for this special service; and, further, that the public hospitals be requested to provide similar facilities without special compensation.